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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 SANTO DOMINGO 000406

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR WHA-FRIEDMAN, WHA/PPC, DRL/PHD, WHA/OAS
NSC FOR SHANNON AND MADISON
LABOR FOR ILAB
TREASURY FOR OASIA-LAMONICA
USDOC FOR 4322/ITA/MAC/WH/CARIBBEAN BASIN DIVISION
USDOC FOR 3134/ITA/USFCS/RD/WH

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: DOMINICAN ELECTIONS #16: OAS OBSERVER MISSION IN
THE WORKS

REF: A. (A) SANTO DOMINGO 355
 1B. (B) SANTO DOMINGO 356

11. (SBU) Following is number 16 in our Dominican presidential election series:

OAS PROPOSES ELECTION OBSERVER MISSION

OAS Special Adviser Santiago Murray, from the Secretariat General's Unit for the Promotion of Democracy, on January 15 called on the Central Election Board (JCE) and this Embassy (poloff and USAID staff) to discuss possible arrangements for an OAS observer mission during the upcoming presidential campaign and election. Murray proposed a technical mission of some 25 specialists in election management, legal aspects, and technology including information technology. Training for judges of the municipal election boards would be on the agenda. At least part of the mission would be on the ground during most of the campaign (which is expected to begin officially o/a January 20; election day will be May 16) and would remain afterward during the vote count and any challenges. Murray's minimum cost estimate was 200,000 U.S. dollars for a mission that would need to draw on locally available resources to achieve adequate coverage.

In our conversation with Murray, we strongly supported the proposed OAS observer mission. Nearly all our contacts, in the political parties and civil society, want international observation to build public confidence in the elections, in the current tense political atmosphere (reflets) and a country where electoral fraud was common until a decade ago. We urged the OAS to have a continuous presence during the entire election process and expressed hope that the formal invitation would be expedited so detailed planning could begin. We mentioned the Department's and Embassy's ongoing effort to identify funding for the OAS observers and offered to work closely with them and any other international observers.

Murray told us the JCE had promised to send a formal invitation before the end of January. He undertook to draft a detailed proposal, with cost estimates, which he would share by e-mail with the Embassy. He also raised the idea of involving locally posted foreign diplomats in the international observation effort, since the OAS observer mission, with the minimum proposed funding, could not provide country-wide coverage. He said OAS already has experience in working with diplomatic observers. We strongly concurred and noted the Ambassador was already participating in a "mini-Dublin Group" of ambassadors who are monitoring the election process and urging the GODR to ensure a clean election.

Pro-government daily "Listin Diario" on January 16 reported Murray's visit to five of the nine JCE judges. JCE president Luis Arias reportedly "had no problem" with the proposed observer mission and indeed welcomed it as "an opportunity for the people to become aware that the high court (JCE) is acting with transparency." Murray described the planned OAS role as facilitating communication between the JCE and political parties, to channel any complaints from them to the JCE and assist in delivering satisfactory responses to the parties. He said points of interest for the observers would include municipal election boards, information systems, and voter registration rolls.

Following through promptly with the invitation, funding, and planning for OAS observers will be essential. The OAS observer mission has the potential to become the centerpiece of international election observation here from February to May, and perhaps through the end of June if the elections go to a second round. By their presence, the OAS observers would add a new dimension to the already planned domestic observation organized by the USAID-supported NGO "Citizen Participation" (Participacion Ciudadana - PC). The proposed lean mission of technical experts could extend its reach

through local diplomats as "force multipliers." The diplomats, below ambassadorial level, could receive orientation on election monitoring from the OAS experts and NGOs such as PC, before going out as formally accredited or informal election observers. Embassy will continue its dialogue with the JCE to urge that the invitation be sent.

¶2. (U) Drafted by Bainbridge Cowell.
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